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UNCLAS OTTAWA 001758

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN FRIENDLY FIRE INCIDENT: CANADIAN REACTION TO DECISION NOT TO PROCEED WITH COURTS MARTIAL AGAINST U.S. PILOTS

¶1. (SBU) The Canadian Government reacted very evenly to the June 19 decision by U.S. Air Force LTGEN Bruce Carlson not to proceed with courts martial against two pilots who mistakenly bombed Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Chretien said the matter is now closed as far as the Canadian Government is concerned. Canadian Chief of Defense Staff GEN Henault issued a statement expressing sympathy with the soldiers' families, reiterating the Canadian Forces' commitment to contributing to international peace and security (including in ISAF), and pledging to work with allies to mitigate the possibility of such incidents in the future.

¶2. (SBU) The families of the four Canadian soldiers killed in the April 2002 incident said they had expected the decision, but most were upset that stronger action was not being taken against the two pilots. A common refrain among the families was a concern that the pilots not be allowed to fly again for the U.S. Air Force. One of the pilots will receive a reprimand and is leaving the Air Force. The second pilot still faces disciplinary proceedings that could result in a reprimand, 30 days confinement to quarters, loss of one month's pay, and/or no longer being permitted to fly for the Air Force. The family of one of the Canadian soldiers filed a wrongful death claim against the U.S. military earlier this year, and that case is ongoing.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: More than one year after the fact, there is a greater realization here now that the friendly fire incident, while tragic, is one of many affecting allied forces. Canadians will continue to scrutinize disciplinary measures taken against the pilots, but most consider the Air Force's handling of the case thus far to have been even-handed.

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